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Las Vegas District

Caliente Resource Area, Caliente, NV

March 1995



Caliente Management Framework Plan and Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan

APPROVED

**White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment
and
Environmental Assessment**

HD
243
.N3
C35
1995

MISSION STATEMENT

The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the stewardship of our public lands. It is committed to manage, protect, and improve these lands in a manner to serve the needs of the American people for all times. Management is based upon the principles of multiple use and sustained yield of our nation's resources within a framework of environmental responsibility and scientific technology. These resources include recreation, rangelands, timber, minerals, watershed, fish and wildlife, wilderness, air and scenic, scientific and cultural values.

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United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Nevada State Office
850 Harvard Way
P.O. Box 12000
Reno, Nevada 89520-0006

In Reply Refer To:
N-57922
1610(W.S.)
(NV-930.1)

March 31, 1995

Dear Reader:

Enclosed for your information and use is a copy of the Caliente Management Framework Plan and Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan Approved White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment and Decision Record. This Amendment and Decision Record completes the land use planning and environmental documentation of the proposal for withdrawing from all forms of public entry, other than livestock grazing, approximately 1,607 hectares (3,972 acres) of public lands in Lincoln County, Nevada.

This document contains two parts: PART 1, MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT, which meets the requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976; and PART 2, DECISION RECORD, which meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Implementation of the Resource Decision to withdraw the subject land will occur when the Secretary or the Interior, or a secretarial officer subordinate to the Secretary who has been delegated the **authority to approve** land withdrawals, approves the Public Land Order.

Additional copies of this Approved Amendment and Decision Record may be obtained from the BLM's Las Vegas District Office at 4765 Vegas Drive, P.O. Box 26569, Las Vegas, Nevada 89126 or the Caliente Resource Area Office, P.O. Box 237, Caliente, Nevada 89008.

Sincerely,

Ann J. Morgan
State Director, Nevada

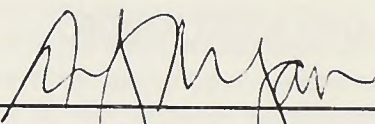
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CALIENTE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN AND NELLIS AIR FORCE RANGE RESOURCE PLAN

APPROVED

WHITE SIDES LAND WITHDRAWAL AMENDMENT AND DECISION RECORD

Prepared by
Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Las Vegas District



Ann J. Morgan
State Director, Nevada
March 31, 1995

Approved White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment and Decision Record outlines management of the White Sides land withdrawal under the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan in the western portion of Lincoln County by the Las Vegas District Office of the Bureau of Land Management.

For further information contact: Las Vegas District Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 4765 Vegas Dr., Las Vegas NV 89108, or telephone (702) 647-5000.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PART 1: MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT	2
A. RESOURCE DECISION	2
B. IMPLEMENTATION	2
C. MONITORING AND EVALUATION	2
D. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT	5
PART 2: DECISION RECORD	6
A. RESOURCE DECISIONS	6
B. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT	6
C. RATIONALE FOR DECISION	6
D. COMPLIANCE AND MONITORING	6
E. APPROVAL	6

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. General location of the White Sides withdrawal area	3
Figure 2. Specific location of the proposed land withdrawal parcels in the White Sides area. This map was developed from the USGS 7.5 minute series quadrangles (Nevada-Lincoln Co.): Groom Range, Groom Range NE, Groom Range SE, and Groom Range SW.	4

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Legal Description of Land in the White Sides Land Withdrawal.	2
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CALIENTE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN AND NELLIS AIR FORCE RANGE RESOURCE PLAN APPROVED WHITE SIDES LAND WITHDRAWAL AMENDMENT AND DECISION RECORD

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Air Force (USAF) applied to withdraw from all forms of public entry, approximately 1,607 hectares (3,972 acres) of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Caliente Resource Area, under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of October 21, 1976 (90 Stat. 2751), subject to all valid existing rights. The withdrawal expands a safety and security buffer zone for the Nellis Air Force Range. The Caliente Management Framework Plan, approved in 1982, provided management direction for the approximately 1.42 million hectares (3.5 million acres) Caliente Resource Area, including the withdrawal land. Since the withdrawal does not conform with land use decisions contained in the Caliente Management Framework Plan, the Management Framework Plan is amended here to allow the withdrawal. The Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan, approved in 1992, was prepared by BLM in response to the Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-606). This land use plan provides long-term management direction for natural and cultural resources on the military-withdrawn lands of the Nellis Air Force Range. The Nellis Air Force **Range Resource Plan is amended** to include the additional acreage of the land withdrawal.

The Nellis Air Force Range is a **unique combination of withdrawn land, overlain by restricted airspace and bounded by public lands and military operating areas and other flight route restraints**. The military considers the Nellis Air Force Range value to national defense unparalleled in that it permits air combat training and testing in an environment where the risk to the public is low and the benefits to the military are high. The Nellis Air Force Range's size, climate, and isolation are ideal for the complex airborne systems and integrated air attack packages used in the national defense strategy. The Nellis Air Force Range is one of the most sophisticated ranges possessed by the military and no other range in the United States offers the multiple benefits to national defense. With the nationwide decline in active military reservations, the range is essential to the Air Force and the national defense.

In 1988, the U.S. Congress withdrew the Groom Range Addition to the Nellis Air Force Range as a security and safety buffer zone between public lands administered by the BLM and the Nellis Air Force Range complex. The USAF subsequently discovered that two areas adjacent to this buffer zone provide viewing of military activities on this portion of the Nellis Air Force Range. Public viewing of military activities (which has often included illegal photography of range activities) has increased during the past few years, necessitating the diversion, postponement, or cancellation of missions to prevent a compromise of national security.

The approved public land withdrawal provides a safety and security buffer between public lands administered by the BLM and withdrawn land under the jurisdiction of the Nellis Air Force Range complex. The withdrawn lands will be used as a safety and security buffer for operations on the Nellis Air Force Range complex to: 1) conduct military training, evaluation, and testing activities, and 2) other defense-related purposes that involve no greater adverse impact on the withdrawn lands than overflights pursuant to military tactical training. The military believes that the additional land is necessary to prevent a compromise of national defense interests and assets.

The approved amendment is in two sections. PART 1: MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT, meets the requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. PART 2: DECISION RECORD, meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. These two sections are presented below.

PART 1: MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

A. RESOURCE DECISION

Withdraw approximately 1,607 hectares (3,972 acres) from settlement, sale, location, or entry under the public land laws, including the mining laws, of the United States, subject to valid existing rights. These lands are located near and around the land form named White Sides which is west of Alamo, Nevada on the west side of Tikaboo Valley in Lincoln County (see Figures 1 and 2). These lands are in two parcels and are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Legal Description of Land in the White Sides Land Withdrawal.

1. Township 6 S., Range 56 E., unsurveyed, Sections 25 and 36.
2. Township 7 S., Range 56 E., unsurveyed, Section 1;
Section 13, W1/2;
Section 24, NW1/4.
3. Township 6 S., Range 57 E.,
Section 30, lots 1 through 4, E1/2 W1/2;
Section 31, lots 1 through 4, E1/2 W1/2, E1/2.
4. Township 7 S., Range 57 E.,
Section 6, lots 1 through 7, S1/2 NE1/4, SE1/4 NW1/4, E1/2 SW1/4, SE1/4.

The land withdrawal will be for a period of about six years, ending November 6, 2001, with the opportunity for review and renewal. All forms of public access, recreation, mineral exploration, oil and gas leasing, and mineral development will be prohibited. The withdrawal underlies restricted airspace used exclusively by military aircraft. However, no air-to-ground and targeting activities are authorized on the land withdrawal. The land withdrawal does not allow the construction of any facilities. The land withdrawal will include the maintenance of existing roads and placing security devices (e.g., posting, warning signs, sensors) along or near the new boundary between the Nellis Air Force Range and public land administered by the BLM. Any **unanticipated** future actions will comply with all applicable environmental requirements, including National Environmental Policy Act, as well as the Clean Air, Clean Water, Endangered Species, and Historic Preservation Acts.

The Caliente Management Framework Plan is amended to exclude the withdrawn area; the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan is amended to include the additional acreage. Management of the withdrawn land will conform to decisions in the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan. **The BLM will continue** to administer livestock grazing on the Bald Mountain Allotment. The Caliente Management Framework Plan will continue to provide management direction for the non-withdrawn portions of the allotment and the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan will provide management direction for those portions within the **military withdrawal**.

B. IMPLEMENTATION

The resource decision to withdraw the **subject lands will be implemented** with the execution of the Public Land Order approved by the Secretary of the Interior or a **secretarial officer subordinate** to the Secretary who has been delegated the authority to approve land withdrawals. **Air Force personnel (military and civilian)** will be restricted to the use of existing roads and trails except for mission **essential requirements (i.e., maintenance of security boundaries)**.

C. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation will be consistent **with and at the same intervals** as required in the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan.

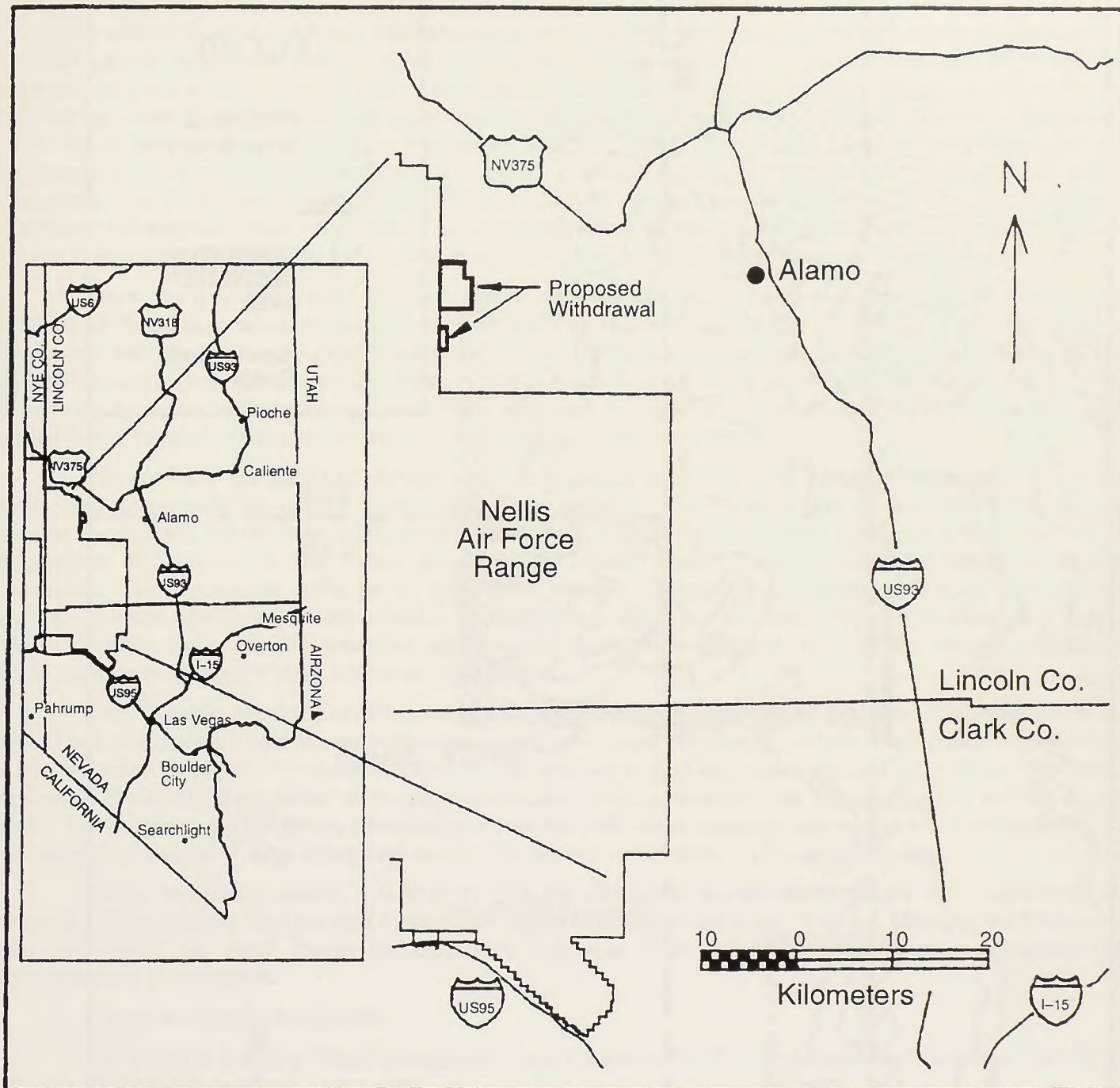


Figure 1. General location of the White Sides withdrawal area.

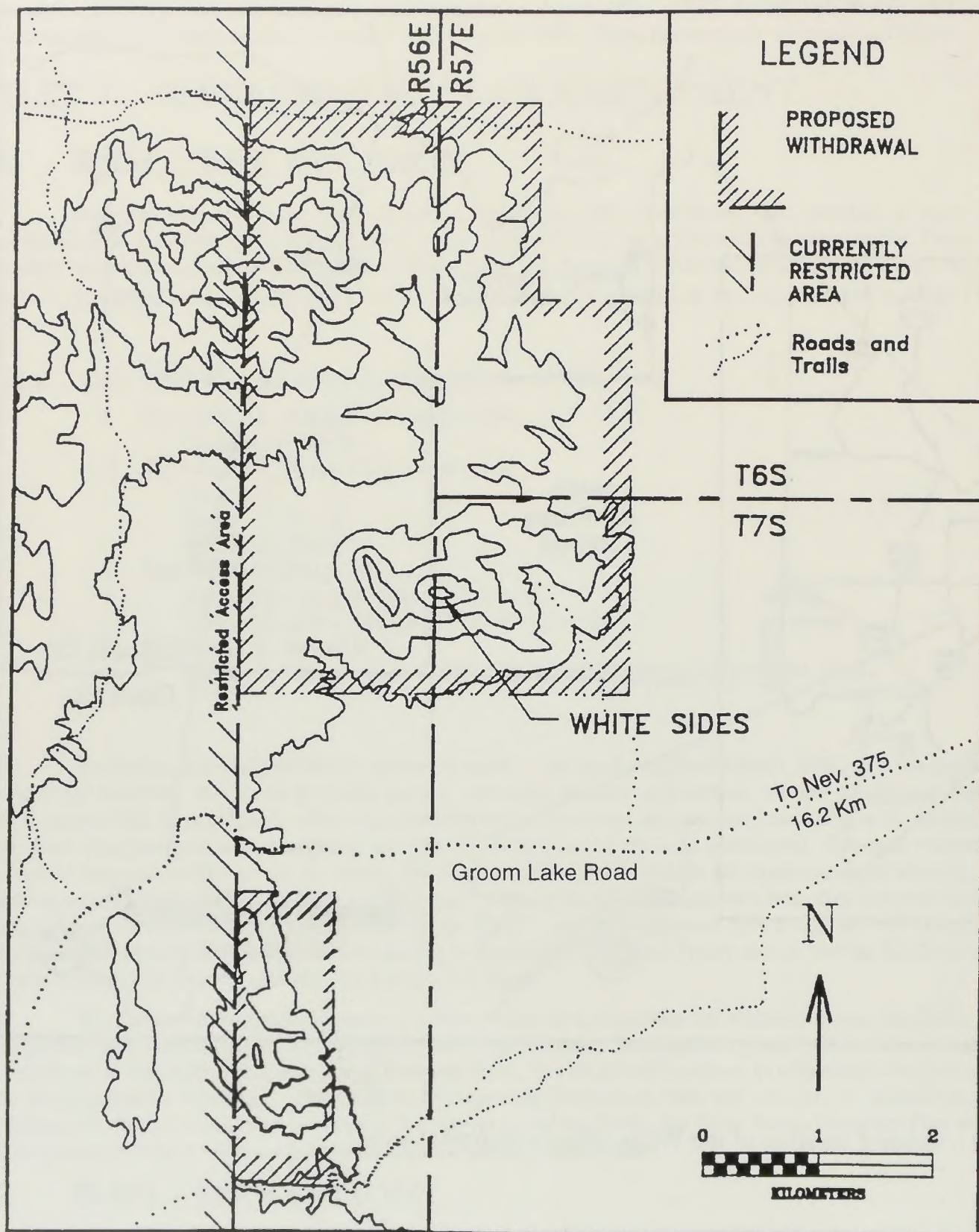


Figure 2. Specific location of the proposed land withdrawal parcels in the White Sides area. This map was developed from the USGS 7.5 minute series quadrangles (Nevada-Lincoln Co.): Groom Range, **Groom Range NE**, Groom Range SE, and Groom Range SW.

D. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the implementing regulations, public comment was solicited on the withdrawal action. After publication of the proposal in the Federal Register, BLM sent out approximately 400 notices. The Air Force and BLM met with local and state government officials and BLM Nevada State Office personnel to discuss the proposal, and held two public meetings: one in Caliente, Nevada on January 31, 1994; the second meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada on March 2, 1994. During these meetings, 47 citizens provided comments or made statements. In addition, a public comment period was provided for submission of written comments. The public sent 44 letters to the BLM, of which 30 percent comprised an identical form letter, originally distributed via electronic mail. A review of the comments indicated that most addressed activities conducted on the Groom Lake portion of the Nellis Air Force Range, rather than issues relating to the proposed withdrawal.

Since the proposed action did not comply with the current land use plan, the Caliente Management Framework Plan, a determination was made by BLM that a land use plan amendment was required. A Federal Register Notice was published concerning the Proposed Action and amendment to the Caliente Management Framework Plan and the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan. A 30-day public scoping period for the plan amendment was provided. Comments from the public scoping period either requested additional information, or reiterated comments made during public meetings and/or letters received prior to the scoping period.

The Air Force and the BLM also met with state and local officials at several hearings to discuss the proposed action and corresponded on specific topics. Specific organizations that the BLM and the Air Force consulted with include the Nevada Congressional Delegation; the Nevada Legislative Committee on Public Lands; the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; the Lincoln County Commissioners; the Mayor of Caliente; recognized Native American tribal groups and Native American interest organizations. Members of recognized Native American tribal groups were invited to participate in a tour of the proposed White Sides withdrawal area on March 12, 1994, and to provide comments and concerns relating to the proposal. No concerns were provided to the BLM from the recognized Native American tribal groups.

The "Caliente Management Framework Plan and Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan Proposed White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment and Environmental Assessment" was made available to the public for review and a 30-day protest period on November 9, 1994. It was also sent to the Governor of Nevada for a 60-day consistency review. A "Notice of Availability" of the proposed document was published in the Federal Register on November 9, 1994. The proposed document was also mailed to over 400 individuals, agencies and groups who participated in and who expressed interest in land withdrawal action. The protest period ended on December 9, 1994.

During the protest period, a total of 13 protests were received, and these protests were resolved by the Director. These protests have resulted in the following three clarifications to the "Caliente Management Framework Plan and Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan Proposed White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment and Environmental Assessment":

- Basis for illegal photography

The basis for defining "illegal photography" is set in law under 18 United States Code Sections 793, 795 and 797 and 50 United States Code Section 797.

- Tiering

The White Sides Withdrawal and Environmental Assessment tiers to the 1986 Groom Range Addition Environmental Impact Statement.

- Statement of Negative Declaration

There are no cumulative impacts identified from the proposed withdrawal action on the following resources: recreation, wildlife, cultural and historical resources, air quality, soil, water quality, grazing, and socioeconomic, including mineral exploration and development.

PART 2: DECISION RECORD

A. RESOURCE DECISIONS

The Proposed Plan Amendment, as modified by the BLM Director's administrative review, is the environmentally preferable alternative and is selected as the Approved White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment to the Caliente Management Framework Plan and Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan. The resource determinations contained in the Preferred Alternative, as displayed in PART 1: MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT section of this document, are the same and are not repeated here.

The following mitigating measure will be applied: Air Force personnel (military and civilian) will be restricted to the use of existing roads and trails except for mission essential requirements (i.e., maintenance of security boundaries).

B. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

A finding of no significant impact was made on November 2, 1994, by the Nevada State Director. This determination was based on the analysis of the potential environmental impacts as addressed in the proposed amendment and environmental assessment document. The Nevada State Director determined that the impacts are not expected to be significant and that an environmental impact statement is not required (see Section 8.0, FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT, on page 31 of the Caliente Management Framework Plan and Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan Proposed White Sides Land Withdrawal and Environmental Assessment).

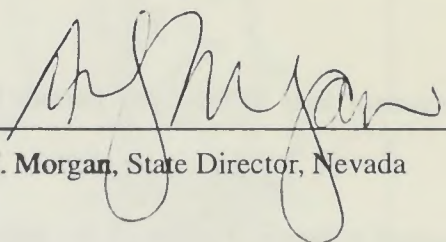
C. RATIONALE FOR DECISION

The resource decision, as outlined in the above approved amendment, was made to facilitate provision of a safety and security buffer between the public lands administered by BLM and withdrawn land under the jurisdiction of the Nellis Air Force Range complex. Implementation of this decision will not result in any unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands.

D. COMPLIANCE AND MONITORING

The decision made in this amendment does not conflict with the resource management decisions of the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan. This decision has also been coordinated with local and state plans concerning **management of public lands**. No conflicts were communicated by the Governor's Office during the **60-day consistency review period**. Where conflicting direction involving the management of public lands may occur **between this plan amendment and those of state and local governments**, this amendment will comply with **the laws and statutes as enacted by Congress** to protect the interests of the citizens of the United States. This amendment **will be evaluated at the same time** as the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan.

E. APPROVAL



Ann J. Morgan, State Director, Nevada

3-31-95
Date

